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*The nature of Christian Liberty explained,
the violations of it marked, and the wea-
pons by which it ought to be defended
pointed out,*

I N A
S E R M O N,

Delivered before the Reverend Synod of
Relief, in the Relief Church, Edinburgh,
May 28. 1776.

By MICHAEL BOSTON, X

Late Minister of the Protestant Dissenting Congre-
gation in Alnwick, Northumberland,

Now Pastor of the Relief Church, Falkirk.

*In necessariis Unitas,
In non necessariis Libertas,
In utrisque Charitas.*

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T O

The PATRONS of the right of
PRIVATE JUDGEMENT,

IN OPPOSITION TO

The lawless Depredations of BIGOTRY,

ON THE ONE HAND,

AND TO

The FRIENDS of CHRISTIAN LIBERTY,

IN OPPOSITION TO

The wanton Incroachments of LICENTIOUSNESS,

ON THE OTHER,

The following DISCOURSE is,

As a Mite thrown into their Treasury,

Respectfully dedicated,

B Y

THE AUTHOR.

T O

The Patrons of the right of
PRIVATE JUDGMENT,

in opposition to

The law's Depravations of Property,

ON THE ONE HAND,

AND TO

The Friends of CHRISTIAN LIBERTY,

IN OPPOSITION TO

The law's Depravations of Liberty,

ON THE OTHER HAND,

The following Proposals:

1. That the law should be so amended as to

abolish the following

THE PATRONS

A

S E R M O N.

GAL. V. I.

*Stand fast, therefore, in the liberty where-
with Christ hath made us free, and be not
entangled again with the yoke of bond-
age.*

IT is the peculiar glory, and distin-
guishing excellency, of the religion of
Jesus, that it builds upon an immove-
able basis, and secures to every individual
the rights of conscience and private judge-
ment. This seems to be a privilege com-
petent to us as men; and therefore the
Redeemer hath invested us with it as
Christians. Every species of false religion
is, in its genius and tendency, hostile to

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this

this glorious branch of Christian liberty. The reason is obvious: As all false and sophisticated religions are destitute of evidence to command the assent of the understanding, as well as of intrinsic excellency to captivate the heart, they must be propagated by violence, or external force: their success, therefore, would be effectually marred, if this unalienable right of mankind were either acknowledged as due, or allowed to individuals. The history of the Mahometan and Popish religions is a sufficient proof of the truth of this remark. The false Prophet of the East propagated his religion by external force, which terminated in the destruction of the rights of conscience; and the ghostly Father of Rome rose to the zenith of his glory, and reached the summit of his exorbitant power, by the same unhallowed means.

It is the defence of this and all the other branches of our Christian liberty, that the apostle inculcates upon the Galatians in the text. This exhortation was naturally introduced by this circumstance: Some Judaizing zealots having found their way into the Galatian church, attempted
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to vilify the character of the apostle, and to subvert his doctrine of justification through the righteousness of Christ, by superadding the works of the law as necessary for that purpose. This perversion of the apostolic doctrine would have entangled the Christians in another galling yoke of bondage, and consequently destroyed a valuable and essential branch of that liberty wherewith their divine Master had made them free. Against this doctrine, so subversive of the gospel-scheme of justification, and so inimical to the liberty of Christians, the apostle, ever watchful over the purity of *the faith once delivered to the saints*, employs his inspired pen; and in the text he calls upon the Galatians to unite their efforts with his to preserve this valuable branch of their Christian liberty against such a dangerous invasion of it: *Stand fast, therefore, in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage.*

These words naturally divide themselves into the following parts.

First, The apostle specifies the privilege of the Galatians, to wit, Liberty; — a

principal branch of which, and to which he particularly alludes, was a freedom from the irksome and galling yoke of Jewish ceremonies.

Secondly, He expresses their duty in consequence of being invested with this liberty, namely, to assert and maintain it with resolution and fortitude, amid the attempts of enemies to ravish it from them; and, in a word, to stand fast in it undaunted, as soldiers do in their ranks on the field of battle; which some think the original word intimates *.

Though the particular branch of Christian liberty which the apostle here exhorts the Galatians to stand fast in, is (as has been observed) their freedom from the ceremonies of the Jewish law; yet it will not (I presume) be offering violence to his meaning, to consider the words as containing an exhortation to Christians to stand fast in their Christian liberty in general, of which that branch alluded to in our text is a valuable part. For, surely, if it is our duty to assert and maintain

* Vid. Leigh's *Critica Sacra*, on the word *ἵκνω*,

one particular branch of Christian liberty, it is equally our duty to stand forth in defence of that liberty in general, and in all its parts.

It is in this point of view that I shall beg leave, with the indulgence of you, my Reverend Fathers and Brethren, to consider the text in the following discourse; in which I shall attempt, under the auspices of Heaven,

FIRST, To make a few remarks upon that liberty wherewith Christ, the sole head of the church, hath invested every Christian.

SECONDLY, To shew what may be supposed a violation or infringement of this liberty.

THIRDLY, To point out the weapons by which it ought to be defended.

FIRST, The object of the first department of the discourse is, to make a few remarks upon that liberty wherewith Christ hath invested every Christian.

1. Christian liberty does not consist in a liberty to dispense with, add to, or alter, any of the laws of Christ.

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Christian liberty, unless we consider particularly wherein it consists; nor, on the other hand, can this precious jewel be preserved from abuse and perversion, without specifying what it is not. To suppose that it consists in a liberty to dispense occasionally with any of the laws of Christ, would be to annihilate these laws, to dissolve their obligations, and to mar their design and utility altogether. The laws of Christ, as they are a transcript of his all-perfect nature, and enjoin and forbid nothing but what is morally good or bad, so every creature is bound to obey them at all times, and in every place, as well on account of their own intrinsic excellency, as of the sovereign authority of their illustrious Author. To dispense, then, with any of these laws, or to say that any duty which they recommend is only of occasional obligation, is not Christian liberty, but an execrable prostitution of it, and the most wanton licentiousness.

Neither does Christian liberty consist in a liberty to add to the laws of Christ; because, as they are perfect in all their parts, they are incapable of addition. Those, therefore, who add to the laws
of

of Christ, and would force upon men any human ordinance as an institution of his, presumptuously derogate from his perfect wisdom, and impiously pervert the liberty he hath bequeathed to his church.

Add to this, that Christian liberty does not consist in a liberty to alter any of the laws of Christ. To alter the laws of Christ, is as impious as to dispense with, or add to them, and is equally inconsistent with the genius of true Christian liberty; because, as these laws are complete in themselves, suited to every case, and calculated to answer all purposes, they need no alteration, and are incapable of it. From this reasoning, then, it will appear, that the liberty of the Christian does not consist in a liberty of dispensing with, adding to, or altering, any of the laws of Christ. To dispense with them occasionally, is to suppose, that they are not of perpetual obligation; to add to them, implies, that they are incomplete; and to alter them, is to say, that they are imperfect. I therefore observe,

2. That true Christian liberty consists in that right which every man has to judge for himself in matters of religion.

The gospel is addressed to every individual as such. It accosts him in his private capacity. It speaks to him as possessed of an immortal spirit, which must either be happy or miserable in the eternal world; and therefore, in consequence of this, a right to judge for himself in matters of religion is his undisputable, his unalienable privilege. Hence it is, that the Divine Author of our religion exhorts his disciples, neither to allow themselves to be called Rabbi *, nor to call any man Father, upon the earth †. Though divinely inspired, they were not to assume to themselves an authoritative power of prescribing in religious matters to others. This is the prerogative of him only who is their Master, even Christ. It was their province only, as the ambassadors of Christ, to publish and declare to mankind the truth, as he had revealed it to them; and, by argument and persuasion, to open their understandings for the reception of it. On the other hand, he commands them, not to call any man their father upon the earth, not to allow any man to dic-

* Matth. xxiii. 8.

† Matth. xxiii. 9.

tate to them in matters of faith, nor tamely to make a compliment to any of that liberty with which he, as the Lord of the conscience, had invested them; because this would be relinquishing the prerogative of Christ, and substituting another in his place. Both these dangerous extremes were to be carefully avoided; because the one substitutes the apostles in the place of Christ, and the other makes any man the *Lord Keeper* of our faith on whom we are pleased to confer that dignity. Upon the same principle does the Apostle Paul reason, when he so warmly expostulates with the members of the Christian church at Rome as to the impropriety of their judging one another: “But
 “why dost thou judge thy brother? or
 “why dost thou set at nought thy brother?
 “ther? For we shall all stand before the
 “judgement-seat of Christ*.” The revelation of the gospel was already given to them, together with a right to each man to judge for himself, as to the principles taught, and the duties inculcated, in that revelation: at the same time Christ had

* Rom. xiv. 10.

reserved to himself the sole power of judging of their faith and practice ; and, consequently, if one man presumed to judge for his brother in religious matters, he impiously encroached upon the prerogative of Christ, and arrogantly infringed that liberty wherewith he had made every individual among them free.

But this is not all. As every man, because the gospel addresses him as an *individual*, has an unalienable right to judge for himself in religious matters ; so he derives that right from this circumstance, that he is answerable to God as an *individual* at last. No man can appear before God by proxy. He cannot answer to the Judge of all the earth by the mouth of another. As he is to answer for himself, he ought to judge for himself ; and if any man is to judge for him, it follows, that that man should, and must, answer for him too : for if his faith is erroneous, the man himself is not so much to be blamed for it, as he who was so complaisant as to dictate it to him.

It was upon this radical principle of gospel-liberty that the first Protestants set
out

out *. It is upon the same principle that their cause and conduct can only be vindicated : for if the right of private judgement be only a pretended or usurped right, then

* Soon after the doctrines of Luther had begun to diffuse their benign influence through Germany, and to disturb the peace of the Holy Father at Rome, the Emperor Charles V. that he might not displease Leo X. who then filled the infallible chair, resolved that Luther should be summoned before the council which was to be assembled at Worms in the year 1521, and that his cause should there be publicly heard. Luther accordingly appeared, and defended his cause before this august assembly, with that undaunted heroism, and that undisturbed presence of mind, which a full conviction of the truth can only inspire. After his departure, however, a sentence was pronounced by his frontless judges, proscribing him as an heretic, and prohibiting all persons, under the severest penalties, either to read his books, or to receive and protect him. In the year 1529, at a diet of the princes of the Germanic empire held at *Spires*, it was decreed, by the majority there present, " That in those places where the " edict of *Worms* had been received, it should be " lawful for no one to change his religion ; that in " those places where the new religion (i. e. the Lutheran) was exercised, it should be maintained, " till the meeting of a council, if the ancient (the " Popish) religion could not be restored, without " danger of disturbing the public peace ; but that

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then it follows, that the separation of the Protestants from the Romish church is insolent and schismatical. When that church attempted, by the power of her arrogated infalli-

“ the mass should not be abolished, nor the *Catholics* hindered from the free exercise of their religion, nor any one of them allowed to embrace *Lutheranism*; that the *Sacramentarians* should be banished the empire; that the *Anabaptists* should be punished with death; and that no preachers should explain the gospel in any other sense than what was approved by the CHURCH.”

Against this decree, totally subversive of the right of private judgement, six princes of the empire, together with fourteen free cities of Germany, entered their protest. Two things chiefly these excellent princes and cities protested against: 1. The restraint which was laid on, and the violence that was offered to the consciences of men, by this arbitrary decree, by which it was ordained, that *no person should change their religion, nor any Catholics be allowed to embrace Lutheranism*. The radical principle upon which their protest was founded, was, That the only rule of religion was the word of God; that it was the duty of every Christian to judge of the sense of it according to the light and convictions of his conscience, to adhere steadfastly to the sacred truths contained in it, and to renounce all principles and practices which appeared to him inconsistent with the dictates of the sacred writings. Accordingly, in the beginning of
their

infallibility, to enforce her unwieldy creed upon the first Protestants, they protested for this right, they pleaded it, and they pleaded it with success. They pleaded it,

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their appeal, the princes “ appealed, for themselves
 “ and their subjects, and for all who either then
 “ did, or for the future should, adhere to the holy
 “ word of God; and declared, That they had no
 “ other design but the honour of God, and his
 “ most holy word, and to provide for their own and
 “ others salvation; and that they neither intended
 “ nor acted any thing but what they were fully con-
 “ vinced they owed to their own consciences, and
 “ even to God himself.” They clearly saw, that
 the edict of the diet at *Spires* substituted the church
 in the place of the Bible, and made the first the
 lord of the conscience, instead of the last; and
 therefore, in order to preserve their Christian privi-
 leges, they protested for liberty to adhere to the
 holy word of God. 2. Another thing against
 which this protest was taken, was that part of the
 decree which enjoined ministers and preachers not
 to explain the gospel in any other sense than what
 was approved by the church. As these two parts
 of this detestable edict buried the liberty, as well
 of the clergy as of the laity, in one common grave,
 these princes protested against both. It was this ce-
 lebrated protest which gave rise to the honourable
 name of *Protestant*; and those only who adhere to
 the principles upon which it is founded deserve the
 appellation. Upon the very same ground did our
 English

I say, with success : for it is well known, that this principle upon which they went, maintained with firmness, and pursued to its consequences with perseverance, shook that vast fabric which had employed ages to rear, and reduced it to that contemptible and insignificant state in which it now languishes.

In that right, then, which every man

English Reformers take their stand. They opposed the infallible authority of scripture to that of the church; and contended, that scripture, and not the church, was the judge in religious controversies. Hence it is obvious, that the right of private judgement is the great basis of the glorious Reformation, and the radical principle of the Protestant faith. Hence, too, it will be obvious, with what justice the penetrating and ingenious Mr Hume pronounces our Venerable Reformers to have been universally inflamed with the highest enthusiasm. If it is enthusiasm to repress the inroads of superstition, to assert the right of private judgement, to maintain, that the sacred records are the only rule of faith and manners, in opposition to the claims of the church, and that every man has an unalienable right to judge of the sense of scripture, according to the light of his own conscience; — if this is enthusiasm, then the Reformers were enthusiasts indeed; and every philosopher, every man of liberal sentiments, will deem it his honour to range with such enthusiasts.

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has to judge for himself in religious matters, does the essence of Christian liberty consist. This right is the glory of our blessed religion, — the legacy of Christ to every man, — the boast of Protestants; and the man who timidly sacrifices it at the shrine of power, or tamely gives it up for the sake of preferment, forfeits all title to the honourable name of *Protestant*.

It is not to be supposed, neither is it intended here to insinuate, that this article contains all the invaluable branches of the Christian's liberty. No : — for, besides this, it implies in it, as the apostle observes, Rom. viii. 2. — a freedom from the law of sin and death, from sin in its guilt and power, and from death in its sting; — a freedom from the spirit of bondage, Rom. viii. 15.; — a freedom of access to God, Eph. ii. 18.; — and a freedom from the yoke of the law alluded to in our text. These are the *internal* branches of the Christian's liberty; this may properly be called the *external* one; which, as it is not perhaps so generally understood by the bulk of professing Christians, we chose to select it from amongst others that might
have

have been introduced here. — I now proceed,

SECONDLY, To show what may be supposed a violation or infringement of the Christian's liberty.

1. The Christian's liberty is violated and infringed, when one man presumes to dictate or prescribe to another in matters of religion.

We have already attempted to prove, that every man has an unalienable right to judge for himself in matters of religion. This right is secured and bequeathed to him by the great Head of the church. It follows, therefore, by natural consequence, that if one man arrogates to himself a power of dictating to another, he encroaches upon his brother's right of private judgement, and violates that liberty wherewith Christ hath made him free. All men stand upon an equal footing in this respect: "And all ye are brethren," Matth. xxiii. 8. And if one man has a right from Christ to judge for himself, so has another, and so have all *. We therefore

* Some may object, — "But all men are not capable

fore violate our brother's liberty, if we
with-hold from him that right to judge
for

“ pable of exercising this right.” Then they are not men ; because this right is competent to them as *rational*, and it is but just to allow it to them as *accountable* beings. — But this objection, I apprehend, is founded upon a supposition, that there must be a public authoritative judge in religious matters. — And who is this judge ? — “ The church.” — What do you call *the church* ? is it the body of the faithful ? That is the very thing we mean when we say, that every member of the church has a right to judge for himself in matters of religion. But if by *the church* you mean, either the civil magistrate, who in some countries is the supreme head, or the clergy, then you make the magistrate the *Pope*, and the clergy the *Creed-makers*. See this objection refuted at full length in those incomparable papers, intituled, *The OLD WHIG*, vol. I. — “ But it will introduce a diversity of opinions.” — What then ? If every man is “ fully persuaded in his own mind,” his brother's opinions can never hurt him. In the apostolic age, when the right of private judgement was exercised by all, there was diversity of opinions. What did the apostles do in this case ? did they withdraw this right from the Christian churches ? did they warn them against it as the fruitful mother of error ? did they invoke the powers in being to *confiscate* their goods, imprison their persons, and inflict upon them all *civil pains and penalties* ? —

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No :

for himself, which we claim to ourselves.

Even the public teachers of religion, whether considered as individuals, or associated together in their collective capaci-

No : — this warlike method of *extirpating* men, and their opinions, was left to more modern and more *enlightened* ages. They employed their spiritual weapons, argument and persuasion. With these they boldly attacked errors, clearly refuted them, and solemnly warned the churches against their baleful leaven and mischievous influence.

“ But it will destroy the *rights* of the church.” — Has the church a right to rob men of their reason, and to ravish from them those privileges given them by the Creator, and recognised to them by the Redeemer? *Tell it not in Gath, &c.* — “ It will annihilate the jurisdiction of the church.”

— Has the church a jurisdiction over mens consciences? then she is not like the apostles, a helper of their joy, but a lord over their faith. It will never destroy the lawful power or jurisdiction of the church, to employ our rational powers and faculties for the very purposes for which the Creator hath bestowed them upon us. If any church claims a jurisdiction which enslaves mens consciences, and destroys the right of private judgement, it is an usurped one, with which her Head never intrusted her; and therefore every Christian, every friend to the common rights of mankind, will emulate another in crying, “ Raze it, Raze it.”

ty, have no power of dominion over mens consciences. St Paul himself disclaims any such authoritative power over conscience as this : “ Not for that we have “ dominion over your faith, but are helpers of your joy,” 2 Cor. i. 24. Add to this, that one man’s dictating to another in religious matters, is not only a violation of his brother’s sacred right to judge for himself, but an arrogant invasion of the prerogative of Christ. He, as head of the church, has the sole power over the conscience, and has reserved to himself the right of prescribing to men a rule of faith and manners; and, consequently, if one man assumes that power over another, he supplants Jesus Christ, substitutes himself in his place, and impiously invades the prerogative of the King of Zion.

2. Christian liberty is infringed by denying the common rights of Christians to such as differ from us in circumstantialia, or in matters of “ doubtful disputation,” though by their fruits they appear to be visible saints.

This practice originates from the church of Rome. There the unnatural birth was brought forth; and we may judge of the

child by the parent. No sooner did the Protestants begin to attack the Romish hierarchy, than that church levelled all her terrible artillery, fulminated a sentence of excommunication against them; denied them the common rights of Christians; and commanded, that no faith should be kept with those whom the infallible chair had pronounced heretics.

This practice is evidently a violation of Christian liberty, and robs our brother of the right of private judgement, which we claim to ourselves. It is injurious, I said, to Christian liberty, because it makes a man's right to the sacred rites of religion to depend, not upon his *fruits*, or visible saintship, but on his perfect uniformity of sentiment with ourselves in every thing. — It robs our brother, I added, of his right of private judgement; for if I exercise that right for myself, and presume to exclude from the ordinances of Christ all who differ from me in any circumstantial, others may do the same to me; and the consequence of all is, the destruction of our mutual liberty, and the entire annihilation of the communion of saints.

3. and lastly, Christian liberty is infringed,

ged, by persecuting and withdrawing our brotherly love from those who have not a perfect uniformity of sentiment in every thing with ourselves.

This practice likewise originated in the Romish church. After the Protestants formed a separation from her, she immediately pronounced them heretic; — a name which at that time called up every frightful idea, and was accompanied with the most dreadful consequences. This is the native effect of bigotry, which generally operates much in the same way upon all who have had the misfortune to fall under the direful enchantments of this detested forcerefs. Bigotry leaves no room for the exercise of charity and brotherly love; because, as it warps the intellectual, so it contracts the moral powers of the mind, and crushes in their first rise the softest feelings of the human heart. Its noxious blasts wither our Christian love; and the poisonous fangs of this *Hydra* benumb our affections. Though its hatred may at first have mens opinions for its object; yet by an easy and sudden transition, that hatred is transferred to and rests
upon

upon their persons, and then brotherly love is totally extinguished.

Now this is not only a breach of the law of Christ, which commands us to love one another, and to do good unto all, but a violation of Christian liberty; because, if I persecute my brother even with the tongue, because he differs from me in lesser matters; if I withdraw from him my Christian love, and, if the power is in my hand, punish him with all civil pains and penalties; — he is cramped in the exercise of his Christian liberty, and through my means innocently suffers, for doing — what? what I do myself, namely, exercising that liberty which Christ hath bequeathed to him. In a word, however much we ought to detest and oppose erroneous opinions, it is still our duty to love the men.

THIRDLY, In pursuance of our method, I proceed to point out the weapons by which Christian liberty ought to be defended.

I. It is not to be defended with the accursed weapon of persecution.

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The divine religion of Jesus of Nazareth cannot be defended but by weapons and means suited unto its genius and nature. It is spiritual in its nature; and therefore the weapons of its defence should be spiritual also. Hence says the apostle, “For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty, through God, to the pulling down of strong holds *.”

Persecution, as ~~it is~~ a carnal weapon, ought never to be employed in the service of Christ. He disclaimed the service of this weapon himself, when he refused, at the solicitation of two of the disciples, to burn, by fire from heaven, the Samaritan city which rejected his word †. The sword has always been the engine by which every species of false religion is propagated; but the amiable religion of Jesus needs not, and therefore scorns, such help. It is able to make its way, spite of all opposition, by the energy of its own evidence, and the attractive power of its own charms, when held forth to the mind in their native colours by the Holy Spirit. But not only does the reli-

* 2 Cor. x. 4.

† Luke, ix. 54. 55.

gion of Jesus stand in no need of the weapon of persecution to support or propagate it, but it is irrational and unscriptural to use it: — *Irrational*; for though it may force a man to be dishonest, yet it can never make him believe what his judgment does not convince him is true: mens thoughts and opinions can neither be hanged, pilloried, whipped, nor burnt: — *Unscriptural*; because it robs a man of that right which Christ gives him to judge for himself, and invades Christ's prerogative to judge all men.

In a word, though our liberties, when threatened or attacked, may be lawfully defended by the sword; yet the cause of Christ is not to be propagated in an offensive way by this carnal weapon. — Therefore we observe, that,

2. Christian liberty is to be defended by adhering to it steadfastly, in all its parts, and opposing all invasions of it, by these truly spiritual weapons, argument and persuasion.

The religion of the gospel is particularly addressed to the spiritual powers and faculties of the soul. These are its great objects. It follows, therefore, that as ar-

gument and persuasion are calculated to impress and affect the powers of the mind, they are the proper weapons to be employed in the defence of our liberty, and the glorious cause of Christ. Persecution, violence, and external force, can only affect the bodies of men, and their outward estates : it is argument and persuasion alone that can influence the mind. Accordingly we find, that these were the weapons our Redeemer himself employed in the defence and propagation of his religion, whilst on earth. When an embassy, consisting of two disciples, were sent by John the Baptist, to inquire if he was the Messiah, or if they were to “ look for “ another,” Christ refers them to the miracles which he had wrought, as an argument calculated to convince their understandings that he was a divine person.

“ Jesus answered and said unto them, Go
 “ and shew John again those things
 “ which ye do hear and see: The blind
 “ receive their sight, and the lame walk,
 “ the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf
 “ hear, the dead are raised up, and the
 “ poor have the gospel preached unto
 D “ them

“ them *.” Thus did our Lord address himself to the judgements of men, and with the greatest clearness lay before them the proofs of his divine mission arising from the accomplishment of the Old-Testament prophecies in him,—the extraordinary nature of his miracles,—the heavenly tendency of his doctrines,—the spotless sanctity of his life ; and so, in the way of argument and persuasion, did he deal with the judgements and consciences of men.

The very same track did his venerable apostles follow. They rested the defence of their cause upon the truth of their Master’s resurrection. Of this important and leading fact they produced the evidence, and stated it with the greatest clearness and perspicuity, leaving the consequences to God : and when another apostle was to be chosen to fill up the vacancy occasioned by the perfidy and death of Judas, this was to be one of his qualifications, namely, that upon personal knowledge he could attest the truth of Christ’s resurrection, in common with the other eleven ; and accordingly the election by lot fell upon Matthias ; who,

* Matth. xi. 3. 4. 5.

as he had “ accompanied with the apostles all the time that the Lord Jesus “ had gone in and out among them *,” was able to lay before the people the evidence of Christ’s resurrection, and so to deal with them in the way of argument and persuasion.

In imitation of these illustrious examples, let us, my Reverend Fathers and Brethren, deal with men as rational creatures. Let us defend our Christian liberty, and support the interest of the Redeemer, by representing his religion in its primitive purity, native beauty, and unadulterated simplicity ; trusting, that by the power of the Spirit of Truth, through our instrumentality, bigotry shall, like Dagon, fall before the ark of God ; and when it falls, sure I am, every real friend of Jesus will chearfully celebrate its funeral-rites, and subscribe this its deserved epitaph, “ Firm may the turf lie on “ its unhallowed head ;” and pray,

“ That such a hateful monster never may
“ Obtain a resurrection-day.”

* See Acts, chap. 1.

“ them *.” Thus did our Lord address himself to the judgements of men, and with the greatest clearness lay before them the proofs of his divine mission arising from the accomplishment of the Old-Testament prophecies in him,—the extraordinary nature of his miracles,—the heavenly tendency of his doctrines,—the spotless sanctity of his life ; and so, in the way of argument and persuasion, did he deal with the judgements and consciences of men.

The very same track did his venerable apostles follow. They rested the defence of their cause upon the truth of their Master’s resurrection. Of this important and leading fact they produced the evidence, and stated it with the greatest clearness and perspicuity, leaving the consequences to God : and when another apostle was to be chosen to fill up the vacancy occasioned by the perfidy and death of Judas, this was to be one of his qualifications, namely, that upon personal knowledge he could attest the truth of Christ’s resurrection, in common with the other eleven ; and accordingly the election by lot fell upon Matthias ; who,

* Matth. xi. 3. 4. 5.

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“ That such a hateful monster never may
“ Obtain a resurrection-day.”

* See Acts, chap. i.

IT now remains to conclude this discourse with a few remarks.

First, From this subject we may justly conclude, that a right to judge for himself in matters of religion, is bequeathed to every man by the Head of the church.

The gospel is addressed to every man as an individual, hence this right. As he is answerable to God at last in his personal capacity, so he has a right to judge for himself. It is the distinguishing characteristic of our holy religion, that it secures this right to every man. Herein it is distinguished from all false religions that ever were, or at present are in the world. The Mahometan and Popish religions, never durst indulge their respective votaries in this right; because, as they have no internal evidence to confirm the understanding in the belief of their divinity, and no intrinsic excellency to captivate the heart, such an indulgence as this would have at once checked the progress, and marred the success, of these religions. Not so with the divine religion of Jesus. It does not call in the assistance of the sword to propagate its interest. It breathes no sanguinary or intolerant spirit, but presents

presents itself to the mind clothed in its native charms, and adorned with its celestial attire. Thus it makes its way to the heart, and thus it surmounts all opposition.

Secondly, From this subject we may infer, that no powers on earth have a right to ravish from the Christian this glorious privilege of judging for himself in matters of religion.

This privilege (as has been repeatedly observed) is bequeathed to us by Christ. Our right to it arises from his bequest. As the sole head of his church, it is his indisputable prerogative to invest his subjects with such immunities as he thinks fit. It follows, therefore, that no earthly powers have authority to spoil the Christian of any of his rights, or to curtail any of his privileges. As Christ himself, not any powers on earth, bestowed upon the Christian his privileges, they have no right to take them away. What they did not, could not give to the Christian, they have no right to take from him. It is their province to interpose their authority to preserve inviolate to him those immunities with which the Redeemer has invested

vested him. If an attempt to rob the Christian of his unalienable rights is made by any powers on earth, it is by an usurped authority, and implies an insolent invasion of the prerogative of the King of Zion.

Whilst I make these remarks, let us at the same time be thankful, that the present powers, under God, and over us, have secured to us by law our religious rights and privileges; and that, under the auspices of our present happy constitution, every man, unmolested, may “ dwell under his vine, and under his fig-tree *.”

Lastly,

* It is somewhat amusing to an inquisitive and philosophic mind, to reflect on the fate which Christian liberty shared in Britain under the various reigns since the Reformation. The daring and intrepid spirit of Henry VIII. emboldened him to throw off the yoke of the Pope's supremacy. But though he renounced the Pope, he retained Popery. Invested with the supremacy, he prescribed a religious creed to his subjects, to save them the trouble of composing one for themselves. He was the *Director*, as well as the Defender of their faith. Instead of Pope Clement VII. the church was then governed by Pope Henry VIII. of queen-killing memory.

Lastly, Let us, my Brethren, in our respective capacities, zealously maintain our Christian liberty, in opposition to the extremes of bigotry on the one hand, and licentiousness on the other.

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memory. The Royal, but manly boy, Edward VI. reared the structure of which his father had laid the foundation. Directed by the sage counsels of Cranmer, the Reformation was established, and Christian liberty treated with greater lenity; though the fires which consumed *Joan Bocher* and *Van Parre* are a proof, that the soil of England was rather too hot for this tender plant. Mary, of blood-thirsty memory, overturned what had been done by her father and brother, and, directed by the savage counsels of Gardiner and Bonner, banished Christian liberty by fire and faggot out of her dominions. In the arms of Elizabeth, of maiden-memory, the Reformation found an asylum; but let her ecclesiastical laws and the Puritans tell, whether Christian liberty was nursed up there too. No BISHOP NO KING, the favourite maxim of her successor, of witch-killing memory, will show, what treatment Christian liberty might expect from him. Though the different sects of religionists enjoyed more peace and freedom in his reign than formerly; yet this was perhaps owing rather to his natural indolence and inactivity, than to any just ideas of the reasonableness and advantages (even in a political sense) of toleration. The lofty ideas of *prerogative*, early received from his father by Charles I. of priest-ridden

These extremes are equally hurtful to genuine Christian liberty. Bigotry destroys it altogether; licentiousness perverts it. The merciless arm of the one robs us of the thing itself; and the wanton hand of the other spoils us of its sweet effects.

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ridden memory, unhappily induced him to enforce national uniformity by royal power; which, had it taken place, would have extinguished Christian liberty: but the monarch being brought to the block, liberty escaped. It was only in Oliver Cromwell that Christian liberty found sanctuary and protection. Imperfect as his *instrument of government* may appear, it protected Christian liberty, and provided that no man should be punished on account of his conscience. At the Restoration, the old game was played over again. Charles II. of covenant keeping memory, finding himself seated on his father's throne, proclaimed war against Christian liberty, and, by attempting to establish a national uniformity with the sword, obliged it to seek shelter in private houses, or in hills and in mountains. His brother, infatuated with his darling prerogative, and fascinated with fondness of arbitrary power, furiously assailed Christian liberty, by attempting to introduce Popery, a foil in which this delicate plant can never thrive; and, after he had exercised his *dispensing* power, to the ruin of the constitution, was obliged at last to *dispense* with his crown, and to sacrifice his kingdom to his *hobby-horse*.

The first banishes it out of the world altogether; the second makes it mischievous in it. Let us therefore guard against these dangerous extremes. Whilst we assert the reality of Christian liberty, in opposition to the fierce and sanguinary bigot, let it be our constant endeavour, to preserve it from the fatal perversions of licentiousness. Whilst bigotry, with the hand of an enemy, attacks our Christian liberty, let us defend its reality; and whilst licentiousness carries it beyond its true bounds, let us assert its proper limits. Whilst we cautiously steer our course betwixt these dan-

Thus Christian liberty having undergone a strange vicissitude of fortune, and long weathered the storm through various reigns, at length gained the shore at the Revolution. This was the æra, the glorious æra, when toleration received the sanction of law, and Christian liberty shone out in the bloom and vigour of health, under the auspices of William and Mary, of immortal memory. Since that felicitating period, this happy isle has enjoyed the sweets of toleration, murmured at only by those who reap the greatest benefit from it, and who owe to it the free exercise of their religion: An inconsistency which strongly marks the caprice of the human heart, and points out that baleful influence which wrong notions of the genius of Christ's kingdom has upon the minds of men.

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gerous rocks, our Christian liberty, that precious *deposit* which Christ hath committed to us, will not suffer shipwreck on either.

To conclude: Let us, with fatherly care, and unwearied tenderneſs, rear and nurse up this tender, but celestial plant; let us, with firmneſs and perfeverance, maintain our Christian liberty, in opposition to the destructive ravages of Bigotry on the one hand, and the wanton perversions of Licentiousneſs on the other; and that the blessing of Heaven may crown with success our endeavours in this way, is our fervent prayer to the Father of spirits, through Jesus Christ our Lord. AMEN.

The E N D.

